

**To:** House Finance Committee

**From:** Wilmaris Soto-Ramos, LCSW and parent to a 7-month-old

**Re:** Support for H-5789, Paid Family Leave

Thank you House Finance Committee members for the opportunity to provide my testimony for such an important topic. My name is Wilmaris; a social worker, a parent advocate and more importantly a mother to a 7-month-old daughter named Amarie. I am writing to fully support House bill 5789 to urge RI extend the number of weeks of paid leave from four weeks (lowest of all the states that offer paid leave) to 12 weeks and to increase the amount of their wages that families get while they are out on leave.

After having my daughter, I was overcome with joy to finally bring a healthy, living baby home as she is our first living child after two consecutive second trimester losses. However, preparing for her arrival brought a lot of anxiety to my family around paid time off, and what is currently offered in RI was simply not enough time for me to heal from 36 hours of labor, first degree tears and experiencing severe postpartum depression. My partner had been laid off due to covid and as the primary bread winner of the family, thinking about how little time I would get to spend with my daughter while recovering without my full wages put our family in a very difficult financial position. Twelve weeks of paid family leave would have reduced some financial stress and emotional stress for our family during my postpartum period. Research also shows that low-income families don't take leave if they don't have adequate income to make ends meet; which forces many families to make choices that they often don't want to and that includes leaving their babies too soon and missing out on important development milestones and bonding.

For the reasons stated above and many more, I am urging the House Finance Committee to pass House bill 5789 to extend the number of weeks of paid leave from the current 4 weeks to 12 weeks. Families, like ours should not be put in a position where we must choose between bonding with our newborns to returning to work without fully being ready to do so. Thank you for your time.